

## Press Clippings 04/24/20

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### All dressed up, nowhere to go

Senior activities such as prom postponed or canceled

By: Darcel Rockett



Angel Grant, a senior at Kenwood Academy, in her prom dress. (Jose M. Osorio/Chicago Tribune )



Mekayla Mrofka, 18, wears her prom dress at home in Oak Forest. (Zbigniew Bzdak/Chicago Tribune )



Kaevyn Williams, 16, in her prom dress outside her home in Zion. (Stacey Wescott/Chicago Tribune )



Whitney Young High School senior Sonja Berg in her prom jumpsuit. (John J. Kim/Chicago Tribune )



Whitney Young High School senior Frances Harris puts on a shawl with her prom dress at home in the Bridgeport neighborhood in Chicago. (John J. Kim/Chicago Tribune )

Frances Harris, 18, is not a novice when it comes to the prom. Having been twice as an underclassman, she wanted her senior year at Whitney Young High School to be special.

“I bought online my first year, then I thrifted my dress last year,” said the Bridgeport resident. “But this year, I wanted the typical prom experience, so my grandma and I went to Peaches and I bought a really nice green dress. My boyfriend bought a brown suit online that he just got that in the mail, but now we don’t know what’s going to happen.”

Harris and other high school seniors are waiting with bated breath hoping that their high school experience ends with an exclamation point and not an ellipsis, or to put it another way — that prom will go on and all the revelry that it promises will be delivered. But with restrictions in place for the pandemic, that’s not a given.

Jalen Jones, a senior at Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy, is looking forward to all the senior activities , including prom June 5. He admits he and his best friend Jaleesa Foster had easily spent a couple of thousand dollars for the event. They planned their custom attire as juniors (silver, pink and white) and planned on renting a white Rolls-Royce truck with chauffeur.

**District U-46** (which includes Elgin, South Elgin, Bartlett, Streamwood and Larkin high schools) has already canceled its proms and pushed back the date of high school graduation

ceremonies due to schools being closed for the remainder of the school year. Others are still keeping hope alive with postponements and delays in hopes that crowds and gatherings will be acceptable before too long.

“We’re the state’s second largest district so we have five high schools and three of the five would have had prom the day that we returned (May 1) and to sell tickets and get all the logistics in place when people are working remotely, that would have been a real uphill battle,” said District U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders.

Students all around Chicagoland are enduring this “will they/won’t they” waiting game. It’s a soap opera no one saw coming, so many already had their dresses — students such as Harris.

“My grandma says if it doesn’t happen, then I have to wear my dress around the neighborhood for a week to get my money’s worth,” she said.

Zion resident Kaevyn Williams, 16, bought her flowered prom dress in late January. According to her mother Jamila Williams, it was love at first sight.

“She saw the dress and cried because I didn’t want to buy it so early,” Williams said of her daughter, a junior at Christian Life School in Kenosha, Wisconsin (the school canceled its May 5 prom). “She said: It’s my dress, so her dad bought it. I think she was the only one who really got ahead of the curve and bought a dress.”

Students such as Mekayla Mrofka, 18, a senior at Oak Forest High School found her dress right before all the stores shut down.

The prom is slated for May 8 at DiNolfo’s Banquets in Mokena. The theme: Starry Night. She chose silver and black as her colors. And while prom festivities haven’t been canceled outright, parents such as Michelle Tancredi get updates from the the school that say: “Our advice would be to put all purchases toward prom on hold at this time.”

“I think my mom cried. I think she was more upset than I was,” said Mrofka. “Everything is shut down for senior things — it’s horrible.

“Me and my best friend, Maddie Tancredi, we’re the editors of the yearbook and we were so excited to pass them out to every class and see what everyone thought because it was our first year being in charge. And now we won’t even get to do that.”

“Any form of prom would be fine with me at this time because you gotta take what you can get,” Jones said. “My parents are a little bummed about it because I’m the oldest, and I would be the first person to go to prom and they really wanted to have that moment.”

No definitive cancellation has taken place yet, Jones said.

Schools such as Hinsdale Central High School have pushed their May 2 prom to May 23 at the Crystal Gardens at Navy Pier. And if that doesn’t work, then the school’s Building Leadership Team will work on other options, according to Sally Phillip, director of student activities.

“If May 23 does not work, we will cross that bridge when we get there,” Phillip said. “So many balls are up in the air all the time right now.”

Harris hasn’t heard anything about the prom being canceled at the Drake this year.

She admits to not wanting to get her hopes up in case it doesn't happen.

District U-46's student advisory group is looking for alternative dates in summer for the prom, Sanders said.

"This is hard on everybody — losing these significant moments in time — there's just so much being upended," Sanders said. "But if it means that we're saving lives, then it's the right thing to do and we'll figure it out on the other side."

## **SPORTS**

**---The Courier-News---04/24/2020**

### **New home for Shaw**

Larkin graduate puts in time at Triton, commits to St. Bonaventure

**By: Paul Johnson**



Triton's Jalen Shaw (40), a Larkin graduate, tries to put up a shot during the second half of the NJCAA Division I District IV Championship game against Moberly on March 9. (Brian O'Mahoney / The Courier-News )



Shaw previously helped Larkin get to its first 4A state final. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune )

The recruiting process for former Larkin center Jalen Shaw was anything but typical.

After a two-year run at Triton, Shaw was ready to make the leap to NCAA Division I men's basketball.

Instead of hopping on planes to check out campuses, however, all he could do was rely on his web browser.

With schools shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic, Shaw took a different path for his recent commitment to St. Bonaventure.

“You have to go with what you feel,” Shaw said. “It was kind of hard because I wasn’t able to visit anywhere. I had to do a lot of online research. It was super hard. I went with my gut.”

Shaw, who also said he was speaking with Ball State, Evansville and San Jose State, had offers from Cleveland State, Florida International, Saint Louis and Southeast Missouri State.

Ultimately, the draw of playing in upstate New York in the rugged Atlantic 10 Conference appealed to the 6-foot-10 Shaw.

“They gave me a virtual visit, told me a lot of things that I like there,” Shaw said. “New York is one of the places I always wanted to go. It was also one of the best spots I could go future wise.

“I’m very excited. I’m happy I’m moving on to the next level.”

The Atlantic 10 was in the news all season, thanks to Dayton.

The Flyers, led by national player of the year Obi Toppin, were on their way to a top seed in the NCAA Tournament before the season was canceled.

“He will get challenged athletically, which oftentimes is what is better for him,” Larkin coach Deryn Carter said of Shaw. “He’ll have to compete at a high level.

“He has all the potential in the world. If it does click, St. Bonaventure will get a steal.”

As a senior, Shaw helped Larkin reach the Class 4A state finals for the first time in program history. He then set out to transform his body and his game at the junior college level.

Shaw, who will have two years of eligibility at St. Bonaventure, averaged 11.3 points and 6.8 rebounds as a sophomore at Triton. He also blocked 65 shots in 33 games.

“I’m a Jalen fan,” Triton coach Steve Christiansen said. “He’s a unique kid. I feel very good about this. He has all the talent you need to be really good.

“There aren’t many 6-foot-10 human beings walking around our planet. It’s not a question of if he will reach his potential, it’s when. There aren’t a lot of big guys with talent like his.”

Shaw is aware of the challenges ahead. He plans on embracing them as he fulfills his dream to play Division I basketball.

“I want to make the best of it,” Shaw said. “That’s why I chose them. It’s a great league to be in.

“You have to push through it. That’s what makes you a better player. I’m happy.”